

The last five months have changed my life. As a person between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, (actually I'm twenty-four due to a backcountry birthday), there comes a time in my life where choices needed to be made. What is next?

Not quite knowing what the rest of life holds can be scary. I was sitting at my parent's house trying to recover from being laid off from two jobs within a few years, and finding a down-turned economy. There were a few places I know I could turn to, yet somehow I felt I needed more out of life than doing something I didn't like just for money.

This line of thinking led me to the internet. A love for the wilderness has always pushed me into the forest whenever possible, so why not try and find a job there. Out of all my searching only one possibility stood out for a college dropout with no true laboring experience: a collaboration between the California Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps in a program called Backcountry Trails.

In April of 2002 I flew from my home state of New York into the Sacramento Airport in California. Twenty-three years old, in a new place, not knowing anyone, with nothing but a backpack. I had been questioning my decision to do this for at least a week prior to hopping on the plane and I truly didn't feel that I had made the right decision until the seven weeks in. I could probably write a book describing the season, the people I met and the jobs I learned, but for now here is what I came out of Backcountry with mentally.

I came to California a twenty-three year old kid, out of options and to a certain extent, tired of life. I call myself a child during this time because although I did adult things like work, drink, and spend too much time in front of the television, I really didn't take my life into my own hands. Responsibility was always pawned off, thus leading me to a point where I was out of money, without a job and back with my parents. Imagine spending most of your life trying to be independent and ending up right where it all started. Not easy. But that was five months ago.

The last five months in Backcountry have done more for me than I could ever put into words. The friends I've made and the changes that have taken place are amazing. I see life like a child yet I am an adult. I would rather have more responsibility, because with it comes respect and the ability to dictate the outcome of the work. Also with responsibilities comes options. All the same options are there with probably hundreds of more as long as I take control and positively go for them.

The Backcountry has given me the tools and the experience to grow into the person I have always wanted to be. I grabbed the opportunity that it provided and I am happier than I have been since childhood.

I am now twenty-four with my entire life ahead of me. Spending the last five months building a community in the middle of the woods, while working harder than I ever have, has changed me. Going in with nothing but questions and coming out with many answers. In reality the experience has given me five months to rethink my goals and to retool my mind. Without this time there is no telling where I would be or wouldn't be.

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